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DISCOURSE

ON

CONFIRMATION:

Designed for the use of such as are to be
confirmed.

By the Rev. JAMES IBBETSON, D.D.

RECTOR OF BUSHEY IN HERTFORDSHIRE,

PREBENDARY OF LINCOLN,

AND

ARCHDEACON OF ST. ALBAN'S.

L O N D O N :

Printed in the Year M.DCC.LXXIV.

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ON
CONFIRMATION.

A C T S viii, 17.

THEN LAID THEY THEIR HANDS ON THEM.

IN TENDING at this time to discourse upon the holy rite of Confirmation, for which good and pious purpose notice has been given to you that the Bishop will speedily come among us, I think it will be of use to premise a few things concerning Baptism.

Our Blessed Saviour, immediately before His Ascension into heaven, gave particular directions to the Apostles, how they were to conduct the great work of making disciples to the Christian Religion; to wit, by baptizing them into the Christian Faith, and by instructing them in the precepts and duties of a Christian Life. Whence ye are led to observe the propriety of that Ordinance of our Church, which admits none to Confirmation, that have not been taught to believe and to do what the Christian Profession requires of them; and moreover the weakness of their opinion and practice, who maintain that none are to be baptized, but such as are first instructed in the Christian Religion. For can it be reasonably imagined, that the Apostles,

who had all of them been bred up in the Jewish religion, which by virtue of a divine precept and institution admitted infants to the benefits of that Covenant by the rite of circumcision, and likewise the infants of profelytes by baptism, upon promise that when they came to years of discretion they should continue therein; can it be imagined, I say, that the Apostles should understand our Saviour, as intending to exclude the children of Christian parents out of the Christian Church, and to debar them from the benefits of the new Covenant of the gospel? Without doubt, the tenour of their Commission was consistent with the practice of the Jewish Church, in making profelytes to their religion; and the Apostles, who very well knew to whom the promise of the Covenant was made, would follow the examples before them, unless they had been commanded to the contrary; that as children were to partake of the promise, they might partake of the sign of it too; so that when they baptized whole families at once, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles ch. 16, we cannot doubt but they baptized little children among the rest: more especially, since Our Saviour declares concerning them, that of such is the kingdom of God; and St. Paul says, they are holy; which cannot be, if they are excluded from entering into the gospel-covenant by Baptism.

In like manner, some have deduced the Rite of Confirmation from an ancient custom among the Jews, to bring their children to be publicly examined before the Congregation and to make a solemn promise, that they would from thence forward faithfully observe the law and be accountable for their sins: whereupon the Congregation offered up their prayers to Almighty God, that He would bless them and enable them to make good their promise. But the Rite of Confirmation in our Church, is, I apprehend, established on better grounds; though it be not ordained by Christ Himself, as is the Sacrament of Baptism, or by His Apostles. The Apostles at Jerusalem, hearing that the Samaritans had been converted and baptized by Philip, sent two from among themselves, Peter and John; who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy

Ghost;

Ghost: for as yet He was fallen upon none of them, only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus: then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. We do not infer from this and the like passages, that the Holy Ghost was never conferred thus but by the hands of an Apostle; lest whilst we deduce the rite of Confirmation from the practice of the Apostles, it may be said to have ceased with them; nevertheless this may well be deemed a fit pattern for Bishops to follow in laying on of hands, to which we do not ascribe any efficacy distinct from the prayers that accompany it. Now though ordinary functions, when performed by the Apostles, had extraordinary effects accompanying them, yet when the extraordinary effects ceased, the functions were continued: accordingly, we find in the earliest writings of Christianity mention of a Confirmation after Baptism; which was looked upon as a completion of Baptism in such as outlive their childhood, and called sometimes by a word signifying so much.

It was not for the sake of any honour or dignity to the highest order in the Church, it was not to magnify the office of the Bishop; but because here is no Sacrament, no express Institution either by Christ or His Apostles, no rule given to practice it, no matter or form prescribed, the laying on of hands being only a gesture in prayer, no fœderal rites declared to belong to it, it being rather a ratifying of baptism than any new stipulation; it was merely for the greater solemnity of the action, that as baptism was usually performed by the lower rank of Ministers, Confirmation was peculiarly a part of the Episcopal function. The Bishops therefore are highly obliged to take care in their respective dioceses, that they who need and desire it may not want an opportunity of coming to this holy Rite; and it was wisely and piously provided in that excellent plan, which was formed many years since for a reformation of the ecclesiastical laws, but most unhappily for this Church and Nation was never completed, that every Bishop should execute the duty of Confirmation *annually*.

Thus

Thus much may well be presumed to be in the power of the Church ; to require all such as have been baptized, to come before the Bishop, and renew their baptismal vow, and pray for God's Holy Spirit to enable them to keep it; and upon their doing this, the Bishop may solemnly pray over them with that ancient ceremony, and natural act or gesture of prayer, imposition of hands; partly as a mark of good will to the person for whom the prayers of the Bishop and the Congregation are offered up; and partly as a sign, that the fatherly hand of God is over all who devote themselves to His service. And this might have been established and practiced ever since the times of the Apostles without any express warrant, and merely upon their precept of doing all things to order and to edifying; especially since the almost universal practice of infant-baptism makes this more necessary than it was in former times, when chiefly adults were baptized. And is it not highly reasonable in itself, that they who gave no actual consent of their own at their baptism, should ratify the promises of their sureties by their personal acknowledgment of the obligation? Is it not entirely consistent with the gracious purposes of the Divine Mercy, to believe, that an abundant portion of God's Grace and Spirit will be poured out upon the sincere and earnest prayers of such persons, as are directed and assisted by the Bishop and Priests that are present, devoutly to take upon themselves the vow of their baptism?

It is the peculiar excellency of the Liturgy of the Church of England, to teach us the indispensable obligation of every part of religious worship, and to instruct us how to perform every duty, as well as to assist us in the performance. It introduces the several offices with a short prefatory discourse, and thereby prepares the parties concerned to perform their duties with understanding. For this purpose, and “ to the end that Confirmation may be ministered to
 “ the more edifying of such as shall receive it, the Church
 “ hath thought good to order, that none shall be Confirmed,
 “ but such as can say the Creed, the Lord's prayer, and
 “ the ten Commandments; and can also answer to such
 “ other questions as in the short Catechism are contained:

“ which

“ which order is very convenient to be observed, to the
 “ end that children being now come to the years of discretion, and having learned what their godfathers and
 “ godmothers promised for them in baptism, they may
 “ themselves with their own mouth and consent openly
 “ before the Church ratify and confirm the same; and also
 “ promise, that by the Grace of God they will evermore
 “ endeavour themselves faithfully to observe such things as
 “ they by their own confession have assented unto.”

In this Admonition are determined the Qualifications of the persons to be confirmed; which I therefore recommend to your serious perusal, that ye may be properly excited to the devout performance of this holy Rite. In the primitive Church, such as were baptized in the presence of the Bishop were immediately presented to him for Confirmation, as well infants as adults; and the same thing is practiced by the Greek Church to this day: our own Church, with greater propriety, and a stricter regard to the nature and design of the Institution, admits only such as are of riper years to be confirmed by the Bishop, as soon after their baptism as conveniently may be. But some may ask us, wherefore is it thought expedient, as is set forth in the rubrick after the ministration of Baptism to such as are of riper years and able to answer for themselves, that they should be confirmed at all? Attend to that remarkable occurrence to the disciples at Ephesus; upon whom, after they had been baptized unto the expectation of the gift of the Holy Ghost, the Apostle St. Paul laid his hands, and then the Holy Ghost came on them. (Acts xix. 5, 6.) Which shews, that the Holy Ghost was not so much the consequence of their being baptized, as of the Apostle's laying on his hands; and that laying on of hands was of use and importance to the Ephesians, even after they had received the sacrament of Baptism. Whence the general rule of our Church is this: that all who have been baptized shall ratify and confirm, in the face of the congregation, with their own consent, the promise made in baptism; and though we do not maintain, that this particular ceremony is a means
 of

of conveying Grace, yet the Successors of the Apostles have constantly used it after their example.

In the next place ye are to observe from the preface or admonition which I have just now read, that some things are left to the prudence and religion of parents and masters, of godfathers and godmothers: that they ought therefore to be very careful to instruct children, to know their duty sufficiently and heartily resolve upon the practice of it; yet so as not to be eager or zealous to bring them too early to Confirmation, nor yet dilatory in keeping them back, till in the vulgar esteem they may be thought too old; which indeed can hardly happen, where persons have not had opportunity of applying sooner. Every thing else belongs to the care, which the Minister of every parish is to use, preparatory to Confirmation; who is therefore directed by the rubrick, “ whensoever the Bishop shall give knowledge for children to be brought unto him for Confirmation, either to bring, or to send in writing, with his hand subscribed thereunto, the names of all such persons within his parish, as he shall think fit to be presented to the Bishop to be confirmed.” And by a Constitution of the Church, as well as the rubrick, he is further enjoined, “ to use his best endeavour to prepare and make able, and likewise to procure as many as he can to be then brought;” and “ to take especial care that none be presented, but such as can render an account of their faith according to the Catechism.” So that the parochial Clergy have this matter almost wholly in their own management; who by a diligent and conscientious attention thereto, may easily secure the devout and religious performance of this Office. Consider moreover, that the Priests, who are present, join with the Bishop in prayer, that God’s Holy Spirit may ever be with them, unto whom Confirmation is then administered; and many of them must needs be present on the day of the Bishop’s Visitation; which perhaps for this very reason (a better cannot be assigned) is appointed for the ministration of this holy rite: whence, I suppose, it has been called “ holding a Confirmation ” as if the Clergy were convened for that purpose. Have we not therefore good reason to say, that the benefits

of Confirmation are in a great measure derived from the Parochial Clergy? For miracles are ceased long since; and when we read, that the Apostles laid their hands on the disciples of Samaria, and they received the Holy Ghost, we must needs suppose, that the power of conferring the Holy Ghost was peculiar to the Apostles and their times: in like manner as we cannot but think, that the power of remitting and retaining sins, so solemnly conferred on them by Our Saviour, had something in it truly miraculous; and did suppose the knowledge of men's hearts, and that they could not be mistaken in the application of that power to particular persons: and in the same sense we must understand several texts of Scripture concerning the Efficacy of the prayers of the Apostles and first Christians, as in a great measure miraculous too. All which should make us very cautious, not to ascribe too much to any human Institution whatsoever.

The nature and end of Confirmation, and the qualifications of the candidates, having been explained in the preface, the Office goes on to direct the manner, how it is to be performed. And perhaps the subsequent part of this Discourse will more earnestly and advantageously engage your attention, if ye take up your prayer-books in your hands, and accompany me through every part of the Office.

The Bishop begins with enquiring of all that are then to be confirmed, and who stand in order before him, "whether they do in the presence of God and before all the congregation, renew the solemn promise and vow that was made in their name at their baptism, ratifying and confirming the same in their own persons, and acknowledging themselves bound to believe and to do all those things, which their godfathers and godmothers then undertook for them;" and every one shall audibly answer, "I do." For the full and comprehensive import of which words, it will be needful to look back to that question in the catechism, "what did your godfathers and godmothers do for you in baptism?" and whoever uses this short answer with sincerity and pious attention, says in effect as followeth. "I do promise and now three things in my own name and person: first, that

I will renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh: 2dly, that I do believe all the articles of the Christian Faith: and 3dly, that I will keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of my life." Moreover, having often declared in my catechism, that I think myself bound to believe and to do what was promised for me in baptism, I will therefore by God's help strengthen myself in this resolution; and because assistance from above is best obtained by thanksgiving and prayer, " I heartily thank our heavenly Father, that He hath called me to this state of salvation through Jesus Christ our Saviour; and I pray unto God to give me His grace, that I may continue in the same unto my life's end."

Observe now, that our Religion does not impose any unmeaning or unedifying forms and ceremonies; if they have been reproached as such, it is only through false opinions, which men have conceived about them; and if any seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God—that no superiour benefit, grace, or dignity is attributed to Confirmation—that your spiritual pastors and teachers, so far from intimating that this holy rite is necessary to salvation, have instructed you, that the Sacraments themselves are not indispensably, but only generally so—that our Church, which thinketh the imposition of hands, together with the prayers of the Bishop and the congregation, needful for obtaining the Holy Ghost, does not therefore determine any thing concerning the measure of the sanctifying power and virtue of the Holy Spirit of God conferred in Baptism; which the Apostle, in his solemn charge to the Ephesians, who had been newly converted from heathenism to Christianity, describes indeed very emphatically and with a peculiar propriety by being " enlightened, and having tasted of the heavenly gift, and being made partakers of the Holy Ghost." Heb: vi. 4. Attend rather to the blessed fruit and effect of the Holy Spirit of God, which does continually dwell and reside in all those, who sincerely perform and make good their baptismal vow, to assist them to all the purposes of holiness and

obedience; whereby they are made partakers of all the benefits of God's Grace, which they are entitled to by baptism. Consider moreover the reasonableness and fitness, that as persons are admitted into God's Church by the inferiour order of Ministers, so the performance of the holy rite of Confirmation should be sought for at their hands who have the pre-eminence, and unto whom the chief authority belongeth. And herein we do not say, the Bishops give the Holy Ghost by the imposition of hands; the Apostles themselves, infinitely their superiours, as light exceedeth darkness, did not do it: they laid on their hands, and God gave the Holy Spirit to those on whom they laid them. In like manner, when, at the first planting of the Gospel, the Holy Ghost did ordinarily point out to them by immediate Revelation the persons, who were most fit to be their substitutes, to supply their room and perfect their beginnings, "the gift that was in them" is therefore said to be "given by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery;" but this was not in the Apostles the gifts of prophesying, or of laying on of hands upon others. And when Our Saviour after His resurrection gave to Them their commission, and breathing on them said, "Receive the Holy Ghost," it is evident, that at that time they received not any miraculous powers of the Spirit, the promise whereof was shortly after to be performed; it was some other effect of the Holy Ghost, which Our Saviour did then bestow; an Authority over the souls of men, part whereof consisted in the power to remit and retain Sins. We know too, that the authority and power which is given unto men in the Church of Christ to be Ministers of holy things, is contained within the number of those gifts, whereof the Holy Ghost is the author: hence it is, that he which giveth this power in all our ecclesiastical ordinations, may say with great propriety, Receive the Holy Ghost, designing such a power as the Spirit of Christ hath endued His Church withal; whereof the imposition of hands is the sign or ceremony.

Remember above all, that the substantial duties of religion are the things to which ye bind yourselves, when ye

pronounce those awful words, "I do." Utter them therefore seriously and with reverence, that so ye may say afterwards, each of ye to yourselves and to one another; "we have avouched this day the Lord to be our God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and to hearken to his voice: and the Lord hath avouched us this day to be His, that we should be holy unto the Lord our God." Deut. xxvi. 17, 18, 19.

Let us proceed now to the next part of the Office; in which the Bishop and the Priests begin their devotions with the congregation, encouraging the parties who have ratified the vow of their baptism, and putting them in mind, that they shall have help from Him who hath made heaven and earth; praising God for bringing them into this holy condition; and finally intreating Him to hear their prayers now to be made in their behalf.

After these short versicles and responses, which are taken out of the book of Psalms, the common treasure of what is good and excellent, and are a proper preparative to the following solemnity, the Bishop proceeds alone in the next place, after the usual admonition in the liturgy to be attentive and earnest in prayer, to collect their petitions into a continued and larger form; wherein he first commemorates God's mercy already bestowed, in that He hath regenerated these His servants, who are come to be confirmed, by water and the Holy Ghost, that is, entitled them by baptism to the enlivening influences of the Spirit; and so, as it were, begotten them again into a state inexpressibly happier than their natural state; a covenant state, wherein God will consider them, whilst they keep their engagements, with peculiar love, as His dear children: in that He hath moreover given unto them forgiveness of all their sins, meaning that He hath given them the assurance of it on the gracious terms of the gospel. He then prays to God "to strengthen them with the Holy Ghost the Comforter, and daily increase in them His manifold gifts of grace; the spirit of wisdom and understanding; the spirit of counsel and ghostly strength; the spirit of knowledge and true godliness;" words of nearly the same import, taken from the Prophet
Isaiah

Isaiah (ch. xii. verse 2.) by whom they are ascribed to our Blessed Redeemer, and designed in this prayer to express very fully all those manifold gifts, which by the special grace and favour of God, through the same Jesus Christ, are bestowed upon His faithful servants; that so they may be filled with the "spirit of God's holy fear;" with that filial and reverential awe of Him, which is the same with obedience; that so by his ministry they may be effectually excited to whatever they are concerned to believe and to do, and by their own diligent improvements be confirmed evermore in the same divine blessings.

The preparatory part of the Office being finished, and all of them in order kneeling before the Bishop, the Rite itself is now to be administered by the ancient ceremony of laying his hand upon the head of each of them severally: a ceremony used from the earliest ages by religious persons, to determine their blessing pronounced to those particular persons on whom the hands are laid. Thus Jacob blessed Ephraim and Manasses, not as a Parent, but as a Prophet. Gen. xlviii. 14. Moses laid his hands on Joshua by express command of God, and as supreme Minister over His people. Numbers xxvii. 18. And Aaron lift up his hand towards the people, and blessed them. Levit. ix. 22. Our Saviour too, in imitation of the usual ceremonies among the Jews, when He was parted from His Apostles and carried up into heaven, lift up His hands and blessed them. Luke xxiv. 51. Ye are all mindful of those apt expressions of His affectionate tenderness towards the little children, that were brought unto Him; how by his outward gesture and deed He declared His good will toward them: for He embraced them in His arms, He laid His hands upon them, and blessed them. Ye have heard likewise, that the Apostles at Jerusalem sent down two of their own body, that they might lay their hands on the people of Samaria. And this was so constantly and regularly observed, that St. Paul, in the Epistle to the Hebrews ch. vi. 1, 2, reckons the laying on of hands among "the principles of the doctrine of Christ." It has therefore been highly esteemed in the Church from that time to this; and is so far from being a popish

popish ceremony, as some have frowardly and reproachfully affected to call it, that the Romanists administer Confirmation, which they deem a Sacrament, by other ceremonies of their own devising, having laid aside this primitive one of the imposition of hands; which therefore the Church of England has restored for its simplicity; not as being of divine appointment, or of any efficacy to confer grace, or a pledge and assurance thereof. And what if some of the most considerable dissenters from our church, who highly esteem many of the most controvertible of its doctrines, yet are offended at its ceremonies as superstitious, have themselves approved it as Apostolical at the same time that they have rashly abolished it; yea, and restored it too?

The Bishop then, with his hand upon the head of each of them severally, implores the divine protection in these plain and solemn words; "Defend, o Lord, this thy child (or this thy servant) with Thy heavenly grace, that he may continue thine for ever: and daily increase in thy Holy Spirit more and more, until he come unto thy everlasting Kingdom." There have been great enquiries concerning the marks of a child of God. Now the word itself, being a title of affection and love, implies an expectation of favour, a dependance for support, and an assurance of blessing on God's part. Answerable to which, it is manifest that the title of the child of God is expressive on our part of the highest obligations of duty and obedience; and in this sense the child of God differeth nothing from the servant of God. This it is to be the sons and children of God, to imitate and resemble God in our dispositions and manners. Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear Children. Eph. v. 1. If we consider well the Scripture doctrine concerning regeneration, or the new birth, or the new creation, herein likewise we need not trouble and puzzle ourselves with any doubtful and obscure marks, to find out by them what our state and condition is, and whether we be the children of God or not. By sin men forfeit the benefit of their natural relation to God, our heavenly Father: by repentance and renewed obedience, they desire to have access again to the divine favour and mercy: and God by accepting their re-
pentance

penitance and pardoning their past sins, through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, and according to the gracious terms and declarations of the Gospel, and giving them the assistance of the Holy Ghost to sanctify them for the future, receives them again as a gracious Father, and adopts them for His sons; whence they are said to be "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God;" John i. 13. "On whom the Father has bestowed such manner of love, that they should be called the sons of God." 1 John iii. 1. Now ye have learned in your catechism, that the principal thing in baptism is "the inward and spiritual grace," which is therein said to be "a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness: for being by nature born in sin, and the children of wrath, we are hereby made the children of grace." And again: Baptism is not only a sign of this grace, but the appointed way of entering into the covenant that entitles us to such grace; "the means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof." Observe then: at the first preaching of the gospel, the persons brought to baptism were adults, such as had been converted from Judaism and Heathenism to the Christian Faith. But now the case is otherwise; they are generally infants. All the reasonings therefore drawn from the nature and form, from the end and design of Baptism, are most properly applied to Christians at that time, when they profess themselves to be Disciples of Christ, with understanding, knowledge and choice; when Baptism is really and effectually "the answer of a good Conscience towards God:" that is, at the time of Confirmation, which may therefore well be deemed an holy Rite. Which matter, if duly considered, would have a powerful influence upon the hearts and lives of men.

And now the Bishop and the Congregation after holy salutations and mutual recommendations of each other to God, desiring God may be with them to assist them in their prayers, as also that God may be with his spirit who is to direct them; what form can be more proper to introduce such joint and public devotions as are suitable to the solemnity, than that which our Lord Himself has taught us? a form seasonab

at all times, but more particularly so now, when they who are confirmed in the glorious privilege of being called the children of God, and “ if children then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ,” may all with one heart and with one voice address themselves chearfully to God and very properly call Him “ our Father,” who “ has given them power to become the sons of God.”

In the next place, supplications are poured forth in humble acknowledgment, that the blessings conferred by this holy rite are derived from the abundant mercy of Him, who is the fountain of goodness and grace; that as the good desire of many who are present, and their resolution to keep their vow, came from God, who alone can enable them to will and to do what is good and acceptable to His Divine Majesty, so the hand of His Minister, which has now been laid upon them, may not be an empty and insignificant sign; but that His fatherly hand may ever be over them, His Holy Spirit may ever be with them and lead them in the knowledge and obedience of His word, that in the end they may obtain everlasting life.

After this Collect, which is an admirable composition of humility and faith, another short and comprehensive one is added in behalf of the whole congregation; that “ the Almighty Lord and Everlasting God will vouchsafe to direct, sanctify and govern both our hearts and bodies in the ways of His laws and in the works of His commandments; that through His mighty protection, both here and ever, we may be preserved in body and soul, through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

Finally, as a Blessing concludes all the Offices of our Church, this ought more especially to end in the same manner, which is itself one continued and solemn benediction.

A strange, enthusiastic opinion has prevailed at several times, that Baptism whensoever administered washes away all antecedent sins of every sort and magnitude. Hence some have deferred it, out of a superstitious delicacy and tenderness of conscience; or perhaps too much attachment to the world. Others again have introduced a different ex-
treme,

time; the ridiculous zeal of being baptized frequently. When this practice was lately resumed in a neighbouring parish, and much people came together every Lord's day to be washed of their sins, ye may remember that I took occasion to explain to you the necessity of entering once and once only into the covenant of grace by baptism; and upon the same grounds I now express my earnest desire, that ye will no more think of being confirmed a second time, as is the indiscreet manner of som; than of being baptized a second time. And this leads me to add a few words concerning that ancient ceremony, the sign of the cross; which at the first Reformation was used in Confirmation, as it is still in Baptism. Observe then, that the sign of the cross is not made any part of the sacrament of baptism, which is complete without it; it is not any sacramental, or operative, or efficacious sign, bringing any virtue to baptism or to the baptized: and when the child has once been received into the congregation of Christ's flock, and "signed with the sign of the cross in token that he shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified," there is no more need to admit him again in the same form, than there is to baptize him again. Nor is it at all necessary or expedient in this matter, to have recourse to the wisdom of our Church, and its pious care for the honour and dignity of all its ordinances, so fully expressed in that declaration concerning the posture of kneeling at the Sacrament of the Lord's supper, "left out of ignorance and infirmity, or out of malice and obstinacy, they be misconstrued and depraved."

Thus it is, this pious and holy rite of Confirmation is administered; and without doubt it highly conduces to make the benefits of baptism more apparent, to encrease knowledge and true religion among men, and moreover to secure the younger sort from being seduced by Papists and Sectaries; especially as it is a most useful and necessary preparative to a due and worthy participation of the Sacrament of the Lord's supper. For if, as the rubrick at the end of this office directs, "there shall none be admitted to the Holy Communion until such time as he be confirmed, or be

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ready

ready and desirous to be confirmed," it is plain, that the Church has declared its sentiments in this matter; that all ignorant, as well as wicked and debauched persons cannot be meet partakers thereof. Whence, as it is a matter of great concern in itself to renew the covenant of baptism in confirmation, there arises a manifold obligation upon parents and masters, upon godfathers and godmothers, to encourage the younger sort and to prepare them for it: and since there is great need, that we should ourselves frequently renew "the vows of God that are upon us" in the Sacrament of the Lord's supper, of this they who are already confirmed ought to be very mindful; their friends ought moreover frequently to remind them. And it is especially the indispensable duty of the Ministers of God, to whom "the word of reconciliation is committed," who are "ambassadors for Christ, to beseech men in His stead to be reconciled to God," who are appointed for this very work "to watch for men's souls, and sent forth by God, to minister for the good of those who shall be heirs of Salvation;" it is, I say, the most important part of their office, when "they preach the word," frequently and diligently to explain to the people committed to their charge the general nature, end and design of every institution of the Christian Religion, and more particularly of the Sacrament of the Lord's supper; the obligations which Christians are under to receive it, the benefits of receiving it worthily, the preparations necessary thereto, together with the groundlessness and vanity of most of those reasons which men usually allege for their absenting from the Communion, under the pretence of want of due preparation. And if they be really unprepared, ought they not to redeem every opportunity to prepare themselves? In vain do men complain of the hardships and difficulties of a virtuous course, in vain do they bemoan the decay of Christianity and the inefficacy of its doctrines and institutions on the lives of its professors, whilst they disdainfully refuse the external means of promoting and improving real and substantial virtue and religion.

These things, ye will bear me witness, I have oftentimes largely insisted upon; trusting, that God will have regard

not to my own insufficiency, but to the purposes of mercy
 which He hath appointed me to serve thereby: and may
 the same God give unto all that hear me, wisdom and
 understanding to know their duty and a heart and will to
 do it.

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